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... A FORMER
U. L. C. PASTOR
LOOKS AT THE

AGREEMENT

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It is just twenty-one years ago since the undersigned, then a pastor in the United Lutheran Church, found in the Missouri Synod a harbor of refuge for one who is a Lutheran not because of early training (I was raised in the Presbyterian Church), nor because of treasured associations, friendships, and loyalties (Lutheran associations and church-life had constituted a new environment for me when I became a member of a Lutheran congregation at the age of sixteen), but because of the Biblical **Confession** of the Lutheran Church and a conscientious desire to adhere to principles and practices accordant with that Confession. A study of our precious Symbolical Books and the conviction that their teachings are thoroughly consonant with the norm of Holy Scripture had preceded the short course of individual instruction which I received in preparation for membership in the Lutheran congregation nearest to my home, a congregation affiliated with the Ministerium of Pennsylvania. During that instruction my desire to enter the ministry of the Lutheran Church ripened into a settled purpose, and a few months after my reception into membership by adult Confirmation I entered upon the course of studies which were continued and completed in institutions of the United Lutheran Church. Many surprises and not a few disappointments met me along the way. At college I was attacked by class-mates and finally "set straight" by the president of the institution (a former Missourian) for my "Missourian views" on election and conversion. Whether the Scriptural doctrine which I maintained on that subject were "Missourian" or no I knew not, but that it was the teaching of the Formula of Concord I did know. The charge of "Missourian tendencies," however, and my recently acquired reading knowledge of German did lead me to look into Missourian literature, such as Grosse's "Unterscheidungslehren," during my college days, and what I found there I recognized as soundly confessional. The higher critical views of the Old Testament taught by a popular young instructor at the theological Seminary, in disagreement with the conservative position held by the unpopular head of the department of Old Testament at the same institution, led me to look more carefully into the doctrine of inspiration, and Dr. Pieper's treatment of 2 Timothy 3,16 in his "Christliche Dogmatik" settled my position as a confessor of verbal inspiration. Shortly after my ordination and installation as associate pastor in my home congregation with the man who had instructed and confirmed me, I became convinced that the position of the Missouri Synod was in all points of doctrine and practice the confessional Lutheran position as I had learned to know it years before from the Book of Concord. I had as yet, however, never set eyes on a "Missourian" in the flesh. My knowledge of our Synod's position was based solely upon its literature, above all Pieper's "Dogmatik."

I used such literature as Pieper's "Fundament des christlichen Glaubens" in preparing doctrinal presentations for my congregation, and also distributed to my people such popular doctrinal tracts as could be obtained in English, for instance, Pieper's "What the Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States during the Seventy-five Years of Its Existence has Taught and Still Teaches" (reprinted in Concordia Cyclopedia, pp. 488-492). Professor T. Graebner's articles on "The Merger" of 1918, reprinted in tract form, rendered me excellent service as a convenient summary in print of some of the things I had learned about the church-body to which I belonged my personal experience. I had been present at the Merger Con-

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vention of 1918 and witnessed with a heavy heart the defeat of Dr. Theodore Emanuel Schmauk by the "middle-of-the-road" candidate for the presidency of the new body, Dr. Knubel.

Gradually the conviction was growing upon me that in such a body as the U.L.C., conceived in compromise and born of the spirit of unionism, I might indeed **teach** Confessional Lutheranism, if my conscience would only permit me to **do** nothing about it, to remain in unionistic fellowship out of loyalty to the organization, to preach verbal inspiration but quietly put up with the denial of a verbally inspired Scripture by the leading professors in the theological Seminaries and the writers in the church periodicals, to testify against the lodge but not disturb the lodge members in my congregation and among my "brother-pastors." But my conscience would not permit this. The tyranny of a unionistic principle which **forbade** doctrinal discipline became with each new instance of its power a more crushing load and a more exquisite torture to a conscience which **demand**ed it. Having personally admonished my class-mates at the Seminary who proudly acknowledged their membership in the Masonic fraternity, I furnished information concerning this membership to the examining committee of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania at the time of our ordination. The matter occasioned some furore, but upon the defiant challenge of these men that their ordination could not be refused while so many pastors of the Ministerium were known to be Masons and nothing was done about it, the ordination proceeded and they remained Masons. When a pastor of the East Pennsylvania Synod (of the former General Synod) appointed his wife to preach in his pulpit during his absence in Europe I joined other pastors of the Pennsylvania Ministerium (of the former General Council) in a protest to the President of the United Lutheran Church to which both of these local Synods in the same territory belonged. He politely answered us that he deplored the practice, but could do nothing at all about it. The Ministerium men said such an incident would defer the merger of these local Synods till some distant future date, but they remained in Church fellowship with the champions of such un-Scriptural practice in the general organization of the U.L.C. Instances of crass unionism with the sects were too extremely numerous to protest, yes, too numerous to keep account of. Meanwhile the U.L.C. displayed a fine Scriptural and confessional basis in its Constitution. In its "Washington Declaration" of 1920 (see "Doctrinal Declarations," published by C.P.H., pp. 11-19) it was supposed to declare against Unionism and the Lodge (or at least the membership of pastors in the Lodge); yet the chief author of that Declaration, after he had by request devoted a class period to its discussion, was congratulated by my aforementioned Masonic class-mates for the kind consideration with which he had treated them as ministerial candidates who were and intended to remain members of the Masonic Lodge. The whole hypocritical mess was an instance of the tyranny of doctrinal indifference under which doctrinal discipline is not only neglected but actually forbidden. Orthodox **talk**, as long as it was kept on an academic plane, was not only tolerated but enjoyed official sanction and precedent, but the proposal to **do** something about the **secus docentes** ("those who teach otherwise") or to occasion a rift in the false unity of organization based upon disunity of principle was met with an official "clamping down" which was truly inquisitorial in its rigor. When the present writer, after

two years' ministry in a U.L.C. congregaton, had come to the point where the tortures of conscience occasioned by continuance in the pastoral office in such a body far outweighed any possible consequences of attempting consistently to carry out what God's Word laid upon his conscience, he sought contacts with Missouri Synod pastors, culminating in a visit to our St. Louis Seminary just after Easter in the year 1926. The counsel given by each individual member of the Faculty was entirely harmonious, and I returned to my congregation to carry it out. At last I had inward peace but outward war. A sermon on verbal inspiration in which the congregation was called upon to take a stand with those who confess this doctrine against those who deny it, and documentary evidence was offered as to where this confession and this denial is to be found, brought the break. The details of this break are of little moment for the present purpose. Suffice it to say that my immediate resignation was demanded not by my congregation but by Synodical officials, and that these same officials effectively prevented any further discussion of the doctrinal issues before the congregation, which I have every reason to believe remains to this day largely ignorant of the reasons why they were so suddenly deprived of their pastor. Lodge members, however, stated subsequently to friends of mine that while they regretted what had occurred, they had been given to understand that either they or I would have to go, and under those circumstances they thought it expedient to get rid of Pastor McLaughlin. The Missouri Synod, which I now loved so dearly, not because of its men, its institutions, its history, and its traditions, with which I was still largely unacquainted, but because of its confessional position, which I knew and with all my heart shared, received me with the open arms of a truly confessional fellowship. I, as a confessional Lutheran, had at last found a spiritual home.

Now, twenty-one years later, this confessional fellowship is imperilled and threatens to sink to the level of an organizational fellowship merely, or one in which confessional solidarity has become a matter of historical record rather than a present reality, so that the "Confessional High-Water Mark of 1907," recorded for the General Council by the biographer of Dr. Schmauk, might be paralleled by a "Confessional High-Water Mark of 1932" on the part of some future historian of the Missouri Synod, looking back to the year in which Dr. Pieper's legacy of sound Scriptural teaching in the "Brief Statement" was unanimously adopted as a confession of our Synodical fellowship. That seems, to date, to have been the last really unanimous action of our Missouri Synod, referring in this connection not to a mere unanimity of a vote in Convention, which need not necessarily go deeper than an agreement on the organizational plane, but to a confessional unity of mind and heart embracing every pastor and congregation and enduring the test of searching examination by the "norma normans" of Holy Scripture.

What has occurred in our Synod in its decline from the heights of the confession of 1932 to the depths of the agreement announced on January 18, 1947, whereby "the withdrawal of 'A Statement' as a basis of discussion shall not be interpreted as a retraction," — is not an official espousal of false doctrine but a refusal of doctrinal discipline. The doctrinal basis of our Synodical Constitution still stands, our adherence to the verbally inspired and inerrant Scripture, our adherence to the Book of Concord of 1580, our

adherence to the "Brief Statement" of 1932 still stands, but so, it is claimed, do the reservations over against the "Brief Statement" in the "Declaration of the Commissioners of the A.L.C." of 1938 still stand, so (according to the agreement) does the "Chicago Statement" still stand as a declaration of a position which may be maintained within the organizational fellowship of the Missouri Synod, though hundreds of individuals within Synod have lodged official protest against its divergence from our confessional position. "The issues involved shall not now be glossed over or ignored," declares the agreement. But the **wording** in which the "mature convictions" of those who issued "A Statement" were expressed is to be glossed over and ignored, is no longer to be discussed, and the **objections voiced** against that wording **have been ignored** in this very agreement. That what the words of "A Statement" say, especially in sections Five, Eight, Nine, and Eleven of said document, is in disagreement with the confessional position of our Synod was my finding in my private study of "A Statement," and was the finding of the very large majority of the local Conference to which I belong after thorough discussion of "A Statement." This conviction of mine was strengthened by my participation as one of the "Ten" appointed by the venerable President of our Synod in conferences with the "Ten" representing the Signers. It is not my purpose in the present writing to summarize the considerations and discussions which brought about and strengthened this conviction, but to point out the situation in which our dear Synod will be placed if it allows the agreement reached by its Praesidium with representatives of the Signers to stand while such convictions are held and expressed, a situation in many respects parallel to that which I had experienced in my previous fellowship as delineated in the first half of this paper.

The Proceedings of the Saginaw Convention, p. 249, correctly declare: "We must squarely face the issue that no matter how acceptable the confessional stand of a church body may be, it must be accompanied by supervision of teaching and by doctrinal discipline, so that no public teaching will be tolerated for any length of time which is contrary to the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions. 2 Thess. 3:14; 2 Tim. 4:10; 1 Cor. 5:13b." Let us now apply this correct and Scripturally supported standard first to the situation in the U.L.C.A. and then to the situation which the "Agreement," if not repudiated, will bring about in our own beloved Synod. The United Lutheran Church in America officially "receives and holds the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and as the only infallible rule and standard of faith and practice, according to which all doctrines and teachers are to be judged" and officially accepts the Book of Concord. Its "Washington Declaration of Principles" (1920) is on the whole a declaration which does not favor unionism and lodgery but rather takes a position against both these evils (to be sure, hardly in such terms as would prove acceptable to us). Yet we have not been able to agree with the U.L.C.'s Savannah Resolution of 1934: "that we already possess a firm basis on which to unite in one Lutheran Church in America and that there is no doctrinal reason why such a union should not come to pass." The obvious reason why we have not been able to accept such an invitation to join with the U.L.C., as has been frequently stated among us, and as is borne out by my experiences narrated above, is the lack of doctrinal discipline in that body. The Baltimore Declaration

of 1938 (U.L.C.) on "The Word of God and the Scriptures" is an officially accepted doctrinal statement on a controverted issue which definitely fails to teach the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture and therefore constitutes an official enunciation of false doctrine. Yet, if this declaration were to be read in the light of the above-quoted Constitutional statement and the Pittsburgh Agreement with the A.L.C., rather than reading the fine confessional paragraph of the Constitution and the equivocal Pittsburgh Agreement in the light of the Baltimore Declaration (the latter being the practice of the U.L.C. as stated by President Knubel at the Omaha Convention, 1940, Proceedings, p. 565), then someone might make out a case for the U.L.C. as having at least avoided a clear-cut statement of false doctrine. But any such plausible attempt to represent the U.L.C. as an officially orthodox and soundly confessional body **would be refuted by the patent fact that clear-cut statements of false doctrine and the false practice based thereon are the order of the day in many U.L.C. institutions, congregations, and publications, and go unretracted and unrebuked.**

The upshot of it all is that **lack of doctrinal discipline destroys confessional fellowship.** Organizational fellowship which persists in spite of doctrinal disagreement (especially when removal of such disagreement is prevented by the specific refusal on the part of those in error to retract, and the agreement of those charged with guarding the purity of doctrine that they need not retract) **is of a unionistic, not a confessional character.** One of our vice presidents stated in the last meeting of the Praesidium with the president's appointees: "'A Statement' has been withdrawn as that for which it was presented. Where is false doctrine directly stated? If they had come out with a clear-cut statement of false doctrine, then it would have to be retracted." Since I hold that to declare a document, the wording of which expresses false teachings and principles, to be non-divisive of church-fellowship, and, therefore, not to insist upon a correction or retraction of the wording of such a public document, is an offense against the principle of **Sola Scriptura**, I had to reply that "if Synod lets the 'Statement' go without retraction it becomes a unionistic body in which I cannot conscientiously hold membership." The two contradicting positions, for instance, on the doctrinal import of Romans 16,17,18, expressed briefly in "A Statement" and at length in the essay on this subject contained in "Speaking the Truth in Love" on the one hand and expressed in the words of Scripture itself and their Scriptural exposition by Dr. Stoeckhardt on the other hand, cannot both stand in the church. **Sola Scriptura** demands only the Scriptural position stand. God grant that the Missouri Synod uphold this position and reject the agreement! Otherwise it would be carrying me back to the position of the U.L.C., whither, God helping me, I shall not return. For the sake of true peace and harmony, for the sake of the souls of the Signers, who if they do not hold the false position expressed by their words will desire to repudiate them, for the sake of peace of conscience, for the sake of confessional fellowship, let Synod reject the agreement and demand retraction of "A Statement"!

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